

design dR Review

de•sign (di zīn¹) *vt.* [ME. *designen* <L. *designare*, to mark out, define>] **1.** to make preliminary sketches of; plan **2.** to plan and carry out in a skillful way **3.** the arrangement of parts, details, form, color, etc. so as to produce a complete and artistic unit

re•view (ri vyōō¹) *vt.* [MFr. *reueue* <L. *redivere*, *re-*, again + *videre*, to see>] **1.** to survey in thought, speech, or writing **2.** to give or write a critical report and evaluation of **3.** to reexamine

Design Review Program Evaluation

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Ravenna Cottages

Northeast Seattle
Design Review Board



Design Review Program Evaluation

Introduction

This report was prepared during Autumn 2001/Winter 2002 by CityDesign and Design Review Program staff at the direction of DCLU management. Its purpose is to make the existing effective and respected Design Review Program even better by identifying key issues and areas for improvement. The report:

- Analyzes stakeholders comments as a concise set of issues and presents a range of options to address each;
- Documents recent program improvements; and
- Proposes final recommendations for implementation in 2002, 2003-4, and 2005-6, along with a schedule and work plan for addressing longer term or larger scale issues.

Given the complexity of the Design Review Program and its connections to other aspects of DCLU's and the City's work, an exhaustive review of every aspect of the Program was not possible during the timeframe of this report. Consequently, the report indicates where additional analysis is needed, and details a schedule and work plan for accomplishing it.

Program History and Accomplishments

Before discussing ways the Design Review Program can be improved, we begin with a recap of the history of the Program, its original mission, and accomplishments. Since the Program's inception in 1994, Design Review Boards have reviewed over 600 projects, and the Program has become an integral part of DCLU's work and visibility in the community.

The program started slowly, reviewing just 14 projects and issuing five recommendations the first year. Each subsequent year added more zones to the review, with a major addition to Downtown review of office uses over 50,000 square feet in 1998, expanded to include housing and hotels in 1999.

In 1997 the number of Boards was reduced and the boundaries simplified, combining sub-areas into larger areas. This resulted

Assumptions

The report is guided by two assumptions:

1. The Design Review Program is well liked and respected by both community members and the design and development community, and
2. the Program is generally working well.

We question neither the underlying intent of the program (to improve design quality of built projects), its structure (volunteer boards for each neighborhood applying acknowledged design guidelines), nor its general process (a sequence of meetings held in the community). What we do in the report is suggest ways to fine-tune the structure and process to better achieve the intent.

4th and Blanchard

Downtown Seattle
Design Review Board



Design Review Program Evolution

1994

Design Review Phase I Launched

New residential and Commercial projects subject to SEPA review abutting a single-family zone, in NC1, NC2, NC3, L3, L4, Midrise, Highrise, C1, and C2 zones required to go through Design Review.

1995

Design Review Phase II Launched

New residential and Commercial projects subject to SEPA in NC1, NC2, NC3 - regardless of adjacency to single-family zones - required to go through Design Review.

1995

Design Review Phase III Launched

New residential and Commercial projects subject to SEPA in L3, L4, Midrise, Highrise - regardless of adjacency to single-family zones - required to go through Design Review.

1998

Design Review added to downtown zones.

2000

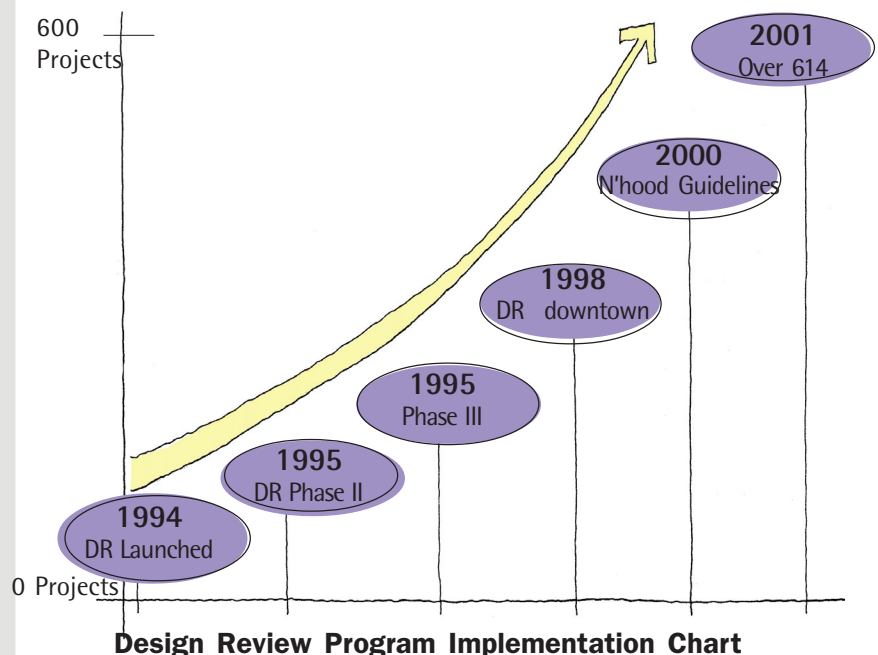
Neighborhood Specific Design Guidelines adopted for several neighborhoods and used by the Boards.

2001

Over 614 Design Review Projects reviewed and only 15 appealed.

in a total of seven geographically-based Boards, and one at-large Board, with a total of 38 Board Members.

The Boards derive their authority from SMC 23.41, which established the Design Review Program. Boards use Council-adopted design review guidelines in their review of projects, starting in 1994 with the "Guidelines for Multi-family and Commercial Buildings". In subsequent years as an outgrowth of the neighborhood planning process and increased interest in design review, seven additional sets of neighborhood-specific design review guidelines were developed. These too have been adopted by City Council.



Previous Evaluations and Comments

Since the inception of the Design Review Program, it has been evaluated comprehensively just once, by the Seattle Design Commission in 1997, after which DCLU responded with a set of proposed program improvements. More recently, a series of stakeholder discussions was held throughout 2001 and into 2002 with DCLU staff, Board members, designers and developers, and community members. These discussions form the basis for the issues and recommendations that follow in this report.

Design Review Program Evaluation

Program Issues

Analyzing the comments received from stakeholders on the Design Review Program to date, we observed that several themes emerged, including:

- *Program staffing and administration;*
- *Board operations;*
- *Design review process;*
- *Public education and outreach;* and
- *Program effectiveness.*

Program Staffing and Administration

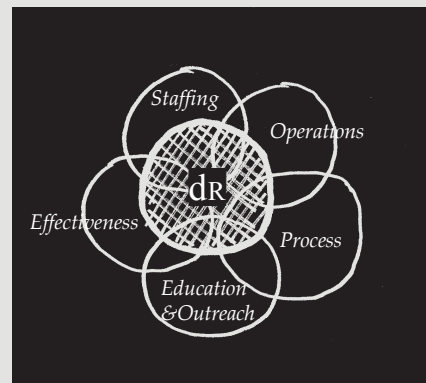
This theme focuses on the staff who keep the Program running. At present, this includes the 1.5 FTE core managing staff, involvement of up to 22 Land Use Planners, and .5 FTE from the Public Resource Center providing administrative support. Staffing and administration is the area of concern that has received the least attention over the life of the Program. Issues break into the following categories:

Staff Expertise, Training, And Development: The success of the Design Review Program is strongly linked to the strength and skills of individual planning staff members. Currently, staff expertise and skill level in Design Review is not consistent among all those involved. Experience in urban design and credibility with design professionals, Board members, and the public is critical in order for staff to be effective in discussing design issues, negotiating design solutions, and writing effective conditions and decisions.

Policies and Procedures: Many changes in DCLU's Land Use personnel have occurred over the years since the Design Review Program began. The current change in Program leadership creates an opportunity to revamp Program policies and procedures, forming a common reference point for all staff regarding Design Review Program operation. Planners have also commented on their desire for a stronger role in project management. Some note the tension inherent in DCLU's twin goals of issuing permits as quickly as possible while also addressing the work of design review

Program Staffing and Administration Objective...

To administer the Design Review Program in a way that supports the intent of the Program to foster better quality projects efficiently and professionally within the context of the other DCLU services.



Design Review Overlapping Themes

“It is important that the planner is able and willing to be creative and think ‘outside of the box.’”

“The Planner needs to see (his) role as that of the voice of the City . . . and be able to articulate the issues the City is having with a particular project.”

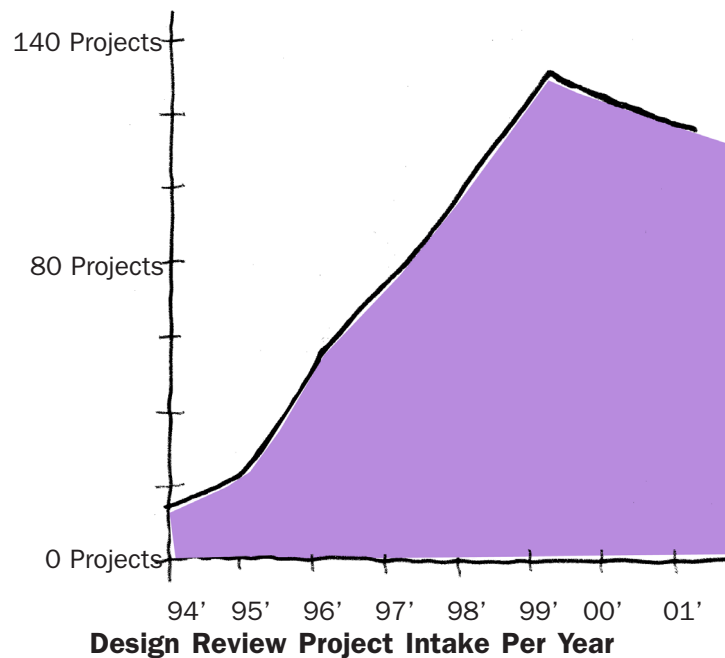
2100 Western Avenue

Downtown Seattle
Design Review Board



thoughtfully and with individual attention. Lastly, there is no clear procedure for planners to track projects through construction to ensure compliance with permit conditions.

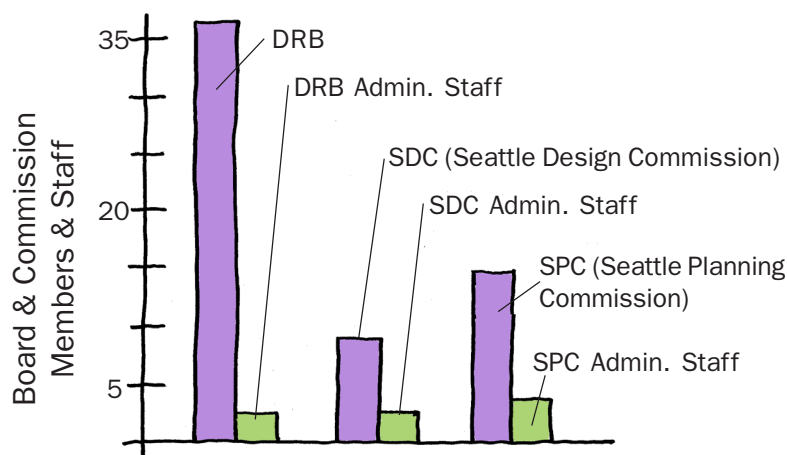
Workload and Staffing Levels: The Program is operating at a serious staffing deficit. Recent history has shown it to be impossible to adequately staff the DRB program with 2 dedicated FTE and still maintain full Board membership, provide technical assistance and other support to approximately twenty planners and administrative staff, be available to mediate with applicants, and logistically arrange for 14+ Board meetings per month. This is particularly true given the increase in the number of projects seen since the Program began. The reputation and quality of the Program has suffered.



Organizational Structure of Design Review within DCLU:

The current organizational structure of the Program is not as supportive of Program objectives as it could be. Aspects of this issue include how the Design Review Program fits within the Land Use Division of DCLU; connections to other parts of DCLU including CityDesign and the Seattle Design Commission; overall Program leadership and philosophy; and lines of reporting, authority, and supervision; and compensation levels.

It is important to note that the Program plays a proportionally larger role in land use review than is apparent from the level of administrative staffing it currently receives. As stated earlier, as many as 22 Land Use planners and two consultants are involved with Design Review. In addition, 38 Board members collectively volunteer over 2500 hours annually, providing over \$1/2 million in donated services to the City. While the number of Design Review projects represent a small fraction of DCLU's overall work, the construction dollar value is much greater. In 2000, Design Review projects accounted for over \$450,000,000 of the over \$1 billion in building permits issued. The Program also functions as one of DCLU's primary "faces" to the general public and development community. At least 3,000 members of the public attend Design Review meetings annually. This level of commitment from Board members, coupled with high public visibility and high profile projects, needs to be reflected in the department's commitment to Program leadership and support for greater resources.



Boards & Commissions Staffing Comparison Diagram

Board Operations

Recruitment, Board Composition, and Attendance: The Design Review Boards undergo extensive changes in membership at least once per year as individual terms end, and more frequently if individual members step down mid-term. Board vacancies are very disruptive to the Boards, applicants, staff, and public, and yet the Design Review Program ordinance is very restrictive regarding how absences may be filled for any given meeting. In addition, current resources are too limited to adequately staff the effort required for continuous recruitment of qualified members of diverse backgrounds.

Board Operations Objective...

To ensure that Boards continue to include members of the highest caliber who are then supported by appropriate training, education, and other resources to conduct design review effectively and efficiently within a public forum.

"Use retiring Board members as emeritus members to help teach new planners and Board members the nuances of design and Board operations and meetings."

Design Review Process Objective...

The primary objective is to ensure that Design Review works effectively by itself as well as a part of the MUP and SEPA processes for new development; as a part of the natural flow of the design process; and in coordination with the regulatory requirements of other City departments where applicable, thereby lending predictability, consistency, and accountability to the overall process.

“It gets confusing when the Design Review Board has approved the design, but staff are still doing zoning review that may require design changes.”

Board Education and Training: Ongoing training is needed to facilitate growth and development of individual Board members and to strengthen each Board and the Program overall in the areas of architectural design review, group process and meeting facilitation, leadership, and communication with the public. Members also need opportunities to discuss among themselves “offline” and even across other Boards to better understand the issues which typically arise in the context of design review. Current staffing levels have been inadequate to provide this training.

Meeting Logistics and Procedures: The staff time involved in finding and scheduling space is considerable, yet in spite of the energy expended, the Program lacks consistent, quality spaces in which the Boards can meet. This impacts meeting performance and success, and ultimately reflects poorly on the Program. Other aspects of meeting logistics and procedures include guidelines for how meetings are to be conducted, standards for applicant materials and presentations, roles of Board members and the Board Chair, and issues of quorum and process for making final recommendations.

Interaction Between Board Members and Staff: In any program that uses volunteer Boards or Commissions, there is considerable work and coordination that occurs “behind the scenes” to enable Board meeting and the Program to run well. A substantial aspect of that work is the development of a strong working relationship between Board members and staff. Because of the number of planners involved in Design Review and the way in which projects are assigned, there hasn’t been the opportunity for planners and Board members to work together enough to develop the rapport that is desired. In addition, there continues to be lack of clarity with respect to the role each plays in the process. The result is confusion, lack of parity, and ineffectiveness.

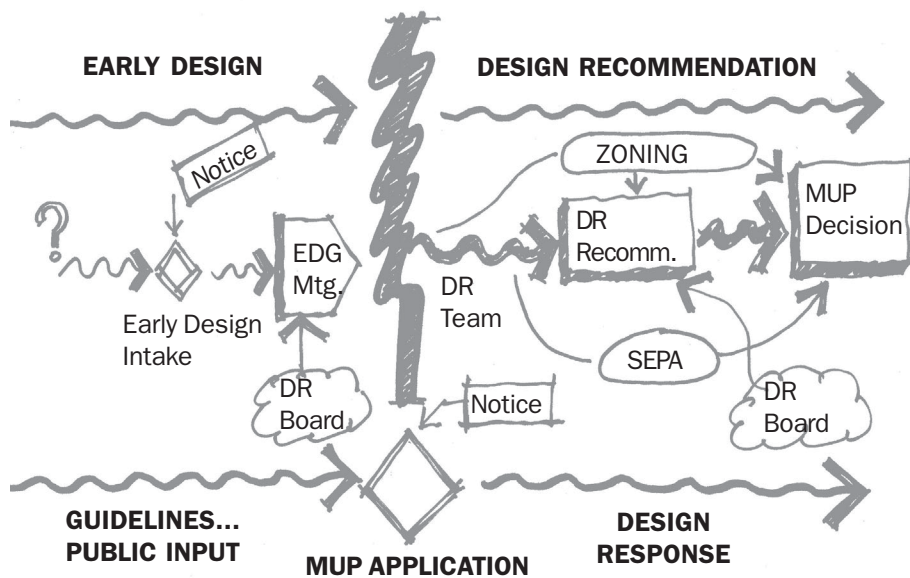
Design Review Process

Scope of Design Review: Stakeholders expressed different objectives with respect to the scope of the Program. Applicants tended to want Design Review to provide an opportunity to negotiate project elements such as parking, and incorporate certain commonly granted departures into the Land Use Code. Staff questioned whether the public is getting enough in exchange (a better design) to warrant the extra scrutiny and process given during Design Review. Community members

expressed interest in lower, not higher, thresholds for projects that are required to undergo design review, generally favoring a broader application of design review to all projects impacting their neighborhoods.

Design Review as a Part of the Master Use Permit Process:

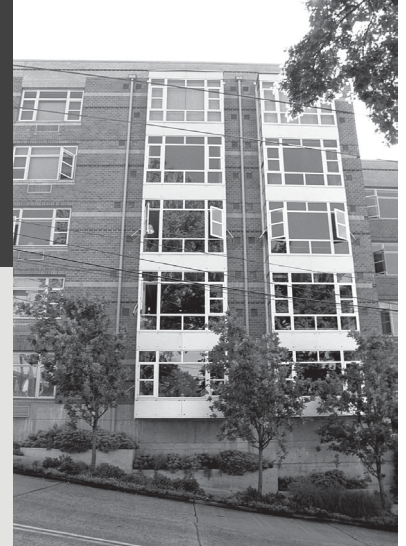
The relationship of the Design Review process to the rest of the Master Use Permit (MUP) process, including SEPA issues and coordination with other City departments, remains a key concern. The following issues were raised: dovetailing the timing of the Early Design Guidance phase of Design Review with the MUP application; level of design completion and documentation required for each; and duplication of efforts. With respect to coordination with other departments, often the Board, applicant, and City staff agree to project street improvements which are later rejected through a subsequent Seattle Transportation department review. This can seriously undermine the project, which may have received certain departures pending completion of those street improvements.



Design Review and the MUP/SEPA Process

Willis Condominiums

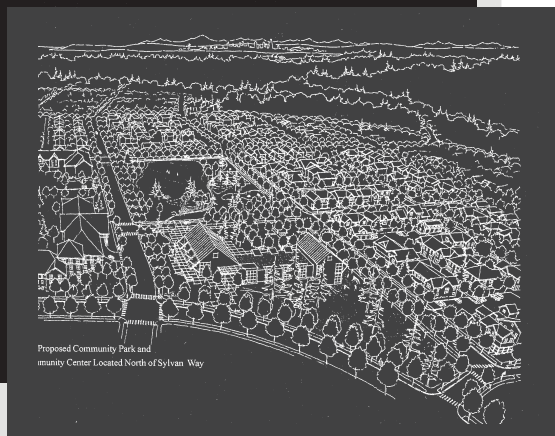
Queen Anne/Magnolia
Design Review Board



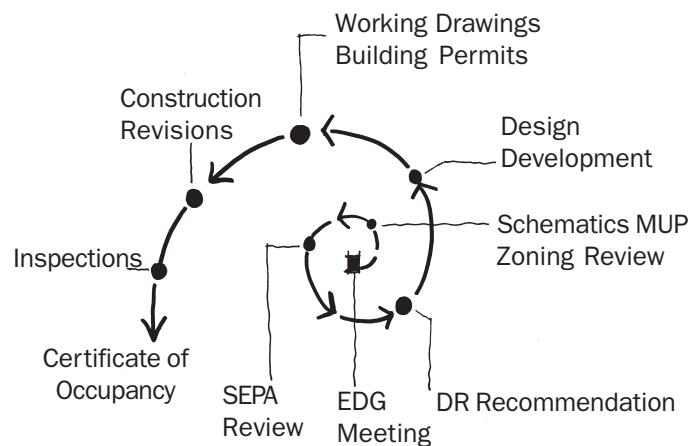
This sketch illustrates the many milestones and reviews a project goes through from the initial design concept to a Master Use Permit decision.

High Point

Joint Review Panel
West Seattle Design Review Board/
Seattle Design Commission



Design Review and the Evolution of Design: Many constituents commented on an incompatibility or poor fit of the design process (as typically followed by project architects) with the sequence and timing of Design Review meetings, particularly the Early Design Guidance (EDG) meetings. Also questioned was the timing of departures—whether the process should require that all departures be stated up front, or whether it is acceptable for applicants to request additional departures after the EDG meeting as the design evolves. Regardless, it is clear the Program works best when its points of interaction with the project synchronize with the applicant's design iterations.



Design Evolution Diagram

Even though the intention of the Early Design Guidance meeting is to share basic site analysis work and gather input from the public and the Board, many stakeholders expressed concern about the EDG meetings. Applicants feel uncomfortable bringing their preliminary work before the public. Community members, on the other hand, often expect more design progress at the EDG meetings. Related to the EDG meetings is the issue of when the next meeting is scheduled. For most projects, sooner is better, in that the earliest phases of design work tend to evolve very quickly. Waiting two or three months for the next available Design Review Board meeting either sets an artificial hold on the project, or results in design getting too far ahead of the Design Review process when architects choose to move forward prior to the next Board meeting. Another aspect of this issue is the management of design changes that occur over time -- what constitutes Board approval and how are subsequent design changes addressed in the permit process?

The Cost and Length of the Design Review Process: Cost concerns loom large for applicants, but are also a factor in how the City manages the Design Review Program. The value provided by 38 volunteer Board members must be considered when calculating the City's investment, as this tremendous resource to the City and applicants is provided for nothing more than the cost of staff support, reserving facilities, and publicizing meetings.

Applicants maintain that the "price" for getting departures has been steadily increasing, in that they are asked to give something back in addition to a better design for each departure requested. Staff and Board members generally believe that requiring demonstrated higher design quality in the form of a tangible improvement is a legitimate requirement for any departure granted. Clearly these opposing positions raise the issue of whether the perception is valid that a "quid pro quo" approach is currently being used in the Design Review Program. Project costs associated with delays in writing decisions and scheduling meetings are another matter that is more easily resolved. The money saved by the drastic reduction in the number of appeals on MUPs with Design Review components also needs to be factored into overall savings.

Public Education and Outreach

Although the basic structure of the Program is fulfilling its mandate to involve the public, there are many other opportunities to build on public education and outreach that have not yet been realized. We hope that, as the public becomes more aware of the Program and more knowledgeable about design in general, expectations will rise and individual projects will benefit, as will the character of the city as a whole.

Despite the Program's many accomplishments, public participation is not as effective as it could be, for a variety of reasons. These include inconsistent meeting locations; bureaucratic meeting notices and a lack of other Program materials; lack of knowledge among the public about the Program; confusion about what issues can be addressed within any particular Design Review meeting; and a disbelief that the meetings really are a chance to interact with the design while it is in a fluid, schematic stage.

Public Education & Outreach Objective...

To provide information to community members about design and development; to improve the dialogue between DCLU, the public, and developers; and to enable citizens to have a voice in how projects are designed and, therefore, positively affect the quality of design for projects built in their communities.

"Not addressing parking and traffic is a big drawback from the public's perspective—that's what they come to discuss, and if they can't, they go away upset."

3824 Evanston Avenue N

Northwest
Design Review Board



Quality of Program Outreach: Program outreach to date has largely been dependent on individual staff responding to specific questions at Board meetings, other public meetings, in telephone conversations and e-mails, and has not benefited from an organized outreach plan. The Program's success to date is beginning to yield a rich array of completed projects from which to demonstrate how the Design Review process works to effect better design. Nonetheless, that success is largely "invisible" without adequate outreach and education.

Improving the Dialogue Between the Public, Developers, and DCLU: Design Review Board meetings are the most obvious and important venue for the public to enter into the design review process and address the impacts of projects in their community. The opportunity for members of the public to attend meetings, provide comments, and listen to Board dialogue--thereby increasing their own awareness of design issues and skill in reviewing projects--is invaluable. In many ways, Design Review is the "face" of DCLU in the community, and this may be the reason there are heightened expectations about what can and should be accomplished and addressed in Board meetings.

While the evening meetings are well timed for public involvement, the locations have not been as visible or welcoming as desired. Citizens are often unsure of Design Review's purpose, how the process works, which issues can be discussed at meetings and which need to be addressed in other forums. In addition, there are issues of meeting facilitation to manage time and otherwise prompt speakers in order to elicit the most useful feedback. In spite of Design Review's general popularity and success, staff, Board members, applicants, and the public have all expressed frustration with the public comment aspect of the Program. In all these areas, there is room for improvement.

Opportunities for Public Education: At its broadest, the Design Review Program has the ability to improve not only the quality of individual buildings, but also the character of entire neighborhoods. Through participation in the Program, all stakeholders have the chance to become advocates for good design of the public realm.

Program Effectiveness

In order to determine quantitatively and qualitatively whether the Program is effective, and if so, in what ways it is effective, we need to be able to measure it against set criteria for what we hope to achieve. We have the criteria--in the form of clear Program goals and objectives--but lack measuring “tools.” The range of options below suggests some tools to develop and implement, as well as some of the basic questions to ask regarding Program success.

Using the Right Tools for the Job: If the “job” of Design Review is to set a standard of quality, and then measure the project’s performance in meeting that standard, are the Design Guidelines (the foundation of the Program) the right tools for that job? Sub-issues include design guidelines in general--what has worked in other programs around the country or world; and the trend toward neighborhood guidelines and whether this suggests satisfaction (or a lack thereof) with citywide guidelines.

Another issue is the tools we have at our disposal for evaluating the success of the Program; specifically the tools we have for data collection and analysis. Currently there is no standard protocol for tracking and documenting the evolution of a project’s design through the review process and, ultimately, post-construction. A distinct absence of tools hampers our ability to assess the effectiveness of the Design Review Program objectively.

Measuring Success: This issue addresses the relationship between the Program’s success and the success of any given project; whether we are actually getting the projects the Boards approve or the projects we wanted; whether the projects are better than if they hadn’t gone through Design Review; and how the “measuring” is done. Enforcement also plays a critical role in the success of the Program overall, and is currently not well integrated into the Program. For example, how can DCLU intervene early in the construction phase to prevent projects from consciously or unconsciously changing approved designs without DCLU approval? Enforcement is the missing link with respect to ensuring that the designs recommended by the Board for approval are those which are actually built.

Program Effectiveness Objective...

To ensure that the Design Review process is yielding tangible results as evidenced by: better project designs, increased public satisfaction with development in their communities, flexible and efficient permitting process for developers, and meaningful, easily implemented guidance to designers.

“Enforcement is the 4th Dimension of Design Review and, if done, ensures against drifting away from the design that was approved by the Board.”

Design Review and Development—the Bigger Picture: As valuable as Design Review is, it is but one part of the overall permitting process, not to mention development process. There are many factors that ultimately affect projects and therefore affect the impact of the Program on any one project. Issues raised by stakeholders illustrate this “both sides of the coin” perspective. Staff expressed concern about agreeing to departures in exchange for other amenities during Design Review that are later eliminated due to cost concerns. Applicants expressed frustration that the Design Review process doesn’t adequately take into consideration the issues of cost and market demand to which they, as developers, are so sensitive. Both concerns lead us to the question of what we are accomplishing in the largest sense of the word. Even assuming the Program does impact individual buildings in a positive way, how does that contribute in a larger sense to the character of the City? What role does the Program play in that regard, and how could we play it better?

Radford Court

Northeast
Design Review Board



Design Review Program Evaluation

Final Recommendations

Based on feedback from key stakeholders and an analysis of potential solutions that can provide the most benefit to the Program, we propose the following recommendations. They are prioritized by 1) how urgently they are needed, and 2) a practical assessment of how and when they might be implemented. The final recommendations are organized into three groups:

- *Those recommendations needed in order to **reinforce** the existing Design Review Program and reverse the impacts that have accumulated as a result of inadequate staffing coupled with Program growth in recent years—implement in 2002*
- *Those needed to **strengthen** the Program and bring it to a state of excellence in accordance with its inherent potential—implement in 2003-4*
- *Those needed to **maintain and improve** the Program; providing ongoing evaluation and fine-tuning, and keeping it as a model for how to improve the quality of design in our built environment—implement in 2005-6 and beyond.*

Recommendations for 2002 include more detail than for subsequent years, so that they might already begin to serve as a work program for current staff. Recommendations for 2003-6 will naturally go through further review and discussion as part of City Budget and work planning processes and new Mayor's initiatives.

Implementation in three Phases...

- Reinforce the Program
- Strengthen the Program
- Maintain and Improve the Program

“The fact that there has been just one appeal out of 60 Design Review projects in 2001 is certainly a testament to the Program’s effectiveness.”

Checklist of 2002 Recommendations...

- ✓ Continue increased staffing levels with existing funds.
- ✓ Redistribute Design Review projects among staff, assigning the majority of projects to a smaller number of planners.
- ✓ Allow Program manager to directly supervise staff.
- ✓ Fill Manager position.
- ✓ Examine models for reorganizing the Program within DCLU.

If the recommendations above are implemented, we can also do the following in 2002:

- ✓ Implement a Board recruitment plan.
- ✓ Implement step one of a staff and Board training plan.
- ✓ Revise core Program materials.

Year 2002: Reinforce the Program

Recommendations

1. Increase staffing and reallocate current resources to provide adequate support to the Program.

While the City is currently not in the position to add new permanent positions to the Program, there is the opportunity to augment staff support through 2002 by continuing the “extra” staffing that has been provided since July 2001 by CityDesign.

Actions:

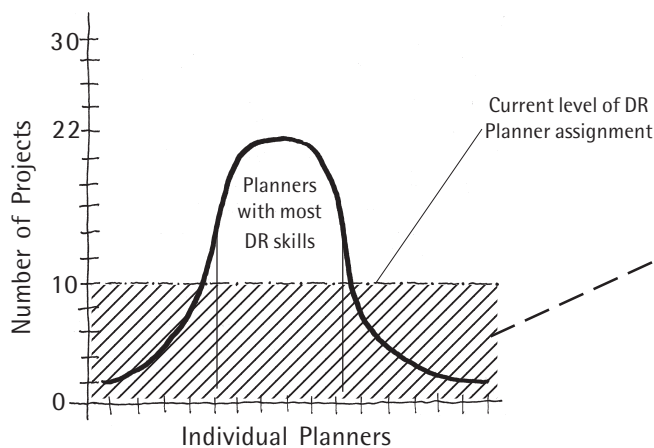
- *Continue CityDesign administrative support at 10 hours per week.*
- *Continue CityDesign senior planning support at 13 hours per week.*
- *Actively pursue hiring TES Staff and/or adding staff through the Municipal Government Intern Program.*
- *Continue existing staffing level with Program Manager and Design Commission liaison positions (1 FTE and ½ FTE, respectively)*
- *Hire permanent program manager.*
- *Reprogram PRC staff responsibilities vis-a-vis the Design Review Program in light of assistance provided above.*

2. Increase the number of Design Review projects assigned to the most skilled and experienced Design Review planners.

Currently there are 20+ Land Use Planners who are either regularly or occasionally assigned a Design Review project. Redistributing the amount and type of projects among a smaller group of planners so that more experienced staff do the majority of the reviews, while still allowing some Program involvement by other staff, holds the promise of better service to constituents, better staff/Board working relationships, and more effective use of Program dollars. This method of making assignments should be considered an interim measure (2002) pending further discussion in 2003-4 of how the Program is staffed and organized within DCLU.

Actions

- *Distribute the bulk of design review projects to approximately 6-8 Land Use Planners.*
- *Ensure that the same Planner who is assigned to a project also attends the intake appointment prior to the EDG meeting and is able to do the zoning review as well.*
- *Inform Boards about this change in staff and project assignments, noting that this is an interim measure which may or may not be continued, depending on its success in providing better service and accountability.*



Distribution of Design Review Projects

20th Avenue E

Capitol/First Hill/Central
Design Review Board



The shaded portion of the graph to the left shows an even distribution of Design Review Projects to planners, regardless of skill sets. The bell curve represents the new Design Review distribution model, redistributing the amount and type of projects among fewer planners. More experienced staff do the majority of the reviews, while still allowing some Program involvement by other staff. Planners doing fewer Design Review projects would then get Design Review training if so desired.

Organizational Models in a Nutshell...

Chart #1: Existing structure

Chart #2: Smaller team of planners doing Design Review, increase in staff support, and stronger supervisory role for manager.

Chart #3: Elevates Design Review manager to level on par with other Land Use managers, overseeing a Design Review team.

3. Allow the Design Review Program Manager to more directly supervise staff involved in the Design Review Program.

The current organizational structure makes it difficult to establish clear communication and Program coordination both internally and externally. The Design Review Program manager should be able to make final decisions regarding substantive design issues, and should have clear authority to hire and manage staff for the Design Review Program. For 2002, it is recommended that this position be filled immediately and granted supervisory responsibility for the planner team referenced in #2, above.

Actions

- *If the permanent position is not filled immediately, provide an out-of-class assignment to the current Senior Urban Design Planner as a Land Use Planner IV or Strategic Advisor Level 3, in order to perform duties as described in above recommendations for the remainder of 2002 or until the hiring process for a permanent Program Manager is completed.*
- *Restructure current lines of reporting to require staff to consult with the Design Review Program Manager on all design review projects.*

4. Examine models for reorganizing the Design Review Program within DCLU as part of the 2003-4 budget planning work.

Our analysis suggests there may be some benefit to reconsidering how the Program is organized within DCLU. The 2003-4 budget cycle is a good time to consider different models for the Program. A key concern with each organizational model is the location (organizationally), the authority, responsibility, and skills of the Program Manager. Another concern is that the Design Review Program is not recognized organizationally as a distinct program.

As shown in organizational chart #1, the management position resides in PoTech, a group that consists primarily of technical resource staff, including a Transportation Planner, an ESA Biologist, and a Training/Education person. This creates an ambiguous perception of the role and function of the Design Review manager and the Program.

Organizational chart #2 shows the pilot project of a smaller team of planners along with continuation of additional staff support from CityDesign described in recommendations #1 and #2.

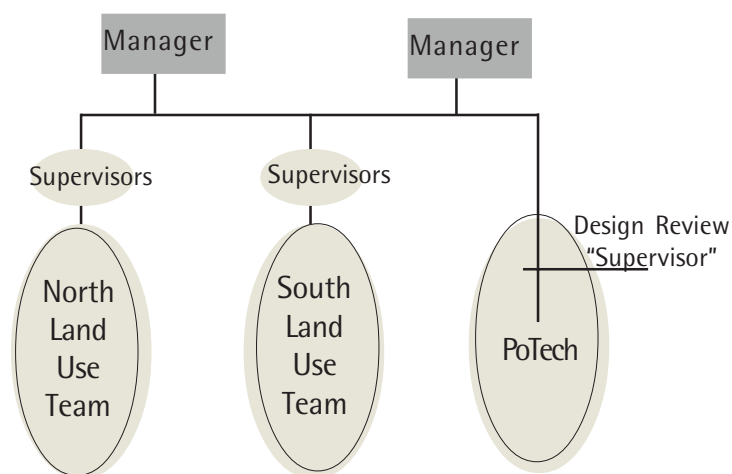


Chart #1: Existing Structure

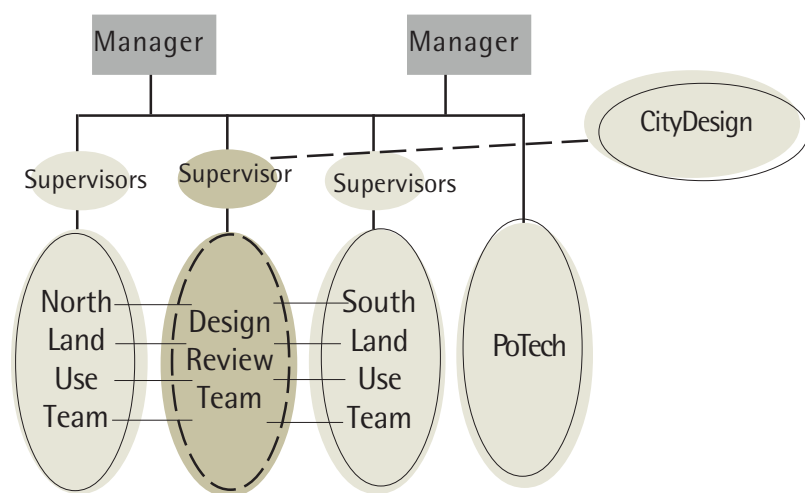


Chart #2: Pilot Program Structure

Victoria Townhomes

Queen Anne/Magnolia
Design Review Board



By slightly modifying the same organizational diagram with the Design Review Manager in between and linked to the two planner teams, we more accurately reflect how the program is actually functioning—organizational chart #3. The connections to the Boards and to CityDesign and Seattle Design Commission are also shown.

Actions

- *Convene an advisory group to review organizational models (and develop new ones as appropriate).*
- *Scope resource needs for the preferred Program organization and submit to the Mayor as part of the DCLU 2003-4 budget.*
- *Based upon mayoral direction for organization of DCLU and the Design Review Program, reclassify Program staff positions commensurate with responsibilities.*

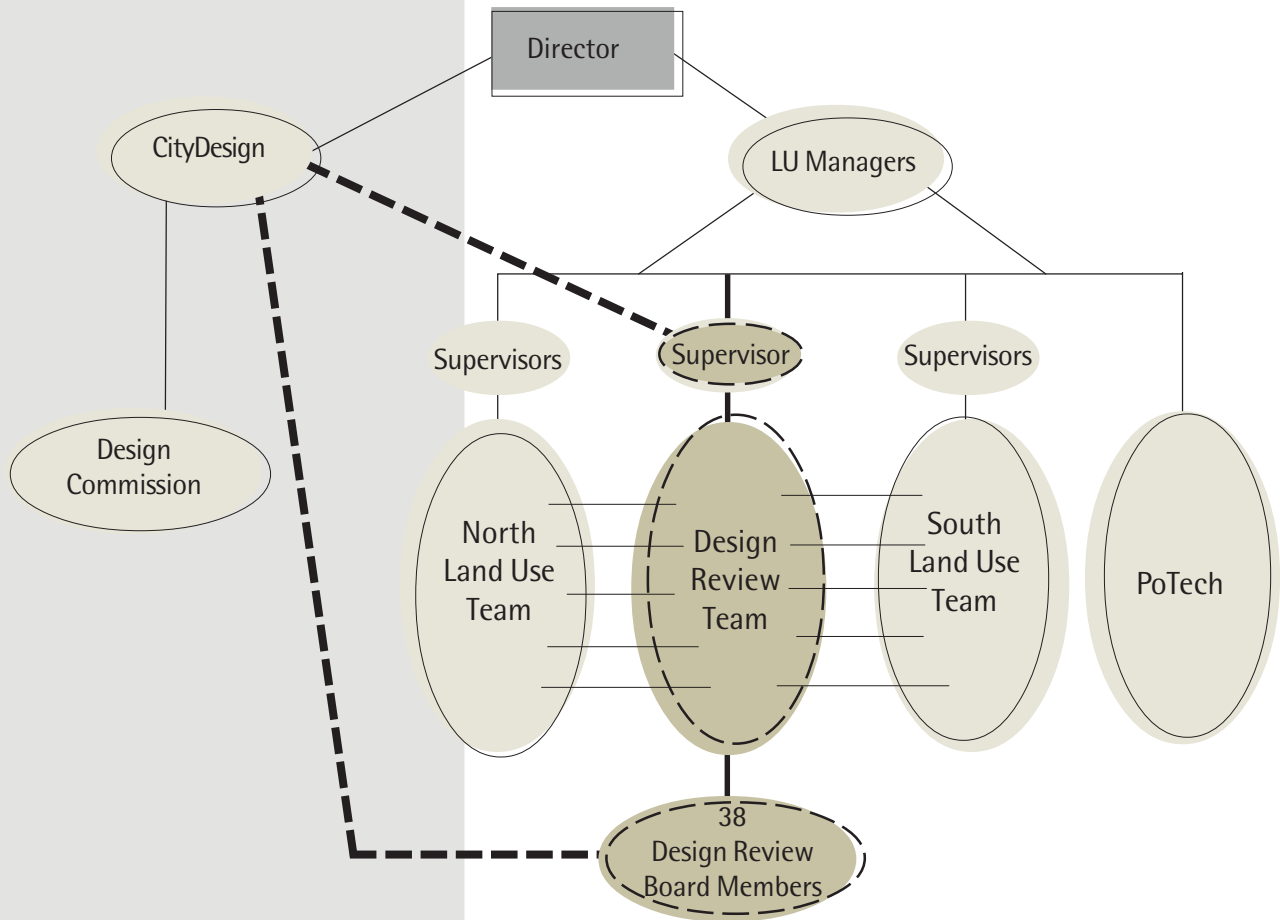


Chart #3: DR Boards and CityDesign

If recommendations 1, 2, and 3 are implemented, the following work items can also be accomplished in 2002 as part of reinforcing the Design Review Program:

Bonus 1. Develop and implement a Board recruitment plan.

Lack of adequate Program staffing has resulted in an “ad hoc” approach to Board recruitment and resulted in significant problems for the Program. With the extra staffing recently provided by CityDesign, we have developed a Board recruitment plan that includes broader outreach, better Board training, and the creation of a roster of potential candidates to draw from well in advance of the April appointment dates. What remains is to implement the plan.

Bonus 2. Develop and implement step one of a Board and staff training program.

The importance of adequately preparing Board members cannot be overstated. Currently, a minimal orientation session is given to Board members after Council appointment in order to prepare them for serving on a Design Review Board. This is not enough. A more complete training program should include a variety of elements, including materials in different media, access to design resources, and hands-on training in design review issues, meeting facilitation and teamwork, and public involvement.

Bonus 3. Revise core Program materials.

A common theme among stakeholders is that Program materials and records are confusing and inadequate to convey the roles and responsibilities of all parties to the process. This is a major obstacle in the public’s awareness and use of the Program, as well as staff’s ability to do their job.

“It is so important to focus on teambuilding each time you add a new member to one of the Boards.”

5430 California Avenue

Southwest Seattle
Design Review Board



Checklist of 2003-4 Recommendations...

- ✓ Implement the preferred reorganization model.
- ✓ Hire a Program Manager (if not already done in 2002).
- ✓ Commit to hiring new staff with design backgrounds.
- ✓ Provide regular training to all staff doing Design Review.
- ✓ Continue and expand Board training.
- ✓ Develop a public outreach plan.
- ✓ Set up a Design Review Program database.
- ✓ Evaluate the Program's effectiveness in improving the quality of design.
- ✓ Commit to greater inspection follow-up for Design Review projects.

2003-4: Strengthen the Program

Implementing the recommendations outlined for 2002 will keep the Design Review Program operational, but will not address long-standing issues in any permanent way. The following recommendations are needed to enable the Program to mature from its early beginnings to an established core element of DCLU services. Pending the outcome of recommendation #1, some recommendations may be more relevant than others, and priorities may need to be revisited.

1. Implement the preferred reorganization of the Design Review Program within DCLU, including an increase in core staffing for the Program.

The functional operation of the Design Review Program must be aligned with the high visibility that this Program maintains. If it is not possible to increase staffing to run the Program adequately, management should seriously reconsider whether to continue the Program at all.

Without adequate staffing, Program quality suffers and reflects poorly on DCLU and the volunteer Board members. It also creates frustration for applicants and the public. In that case, it may be better to eliminate the formal Board review process and conduct a more limited form of design review as part of the regular permit process.

2. Complete the hiring process for the Program Manager (if not already done in 2002).

The person managing the Design Review Program must be more than a “manager”—s/he needs to have established credibility in the design and development community, and must serve as a leader and ambassador for the City on design. S/he must provide motivation for Boards and staff doing the project reviews. The leader must have the depth of experience and confidence of management in all aspects of the program so that it can be said “The design buck stops here!”

3. Commit to hiring staff with design backgrounds—both academic and working experience.

This qualification makes a huge difference to Board members and applicants. Both are more likely to accept direction from staff, and work proactively with them in the early stages, if they respect the skills staff has.

4. Provide regular training to all staff involved in Design Review projects.

Supervisors should encourage and support training that occurs both during working hours and off hours such as classes, workshops, and conferences. Employees should be supported in pursuing higher education for the purpose of strengthening their Design Review skills.

5. Continue and expand Board training.

During the 2nd year of Board training, we would continue the efforts from 2002 including quarterly training sessions, initial orientation sessions for new members, increased coordination with the Seattle Design Commission, and publication of a Design Review Board newsletter. New efforts would likely include instigating regular business meetings for each Board, developing new policies and procedures to replace outmoded ones, creating an “emeritus Board member” program to use former Board members in training and outreach efforts, and potentially hosting a Design Review conference.

6. Revise the Design Review ordinance to make needed changes to the Program.

Changes might include more flexibility filling Board vacancies for specific meetings, revising Board boundaries, and restructuring the at-large Board.

7. Develop a comprehensive public outreach plan.

Better outreach to the public is essential in order to maximize the educational aspects of the Design Review Program.

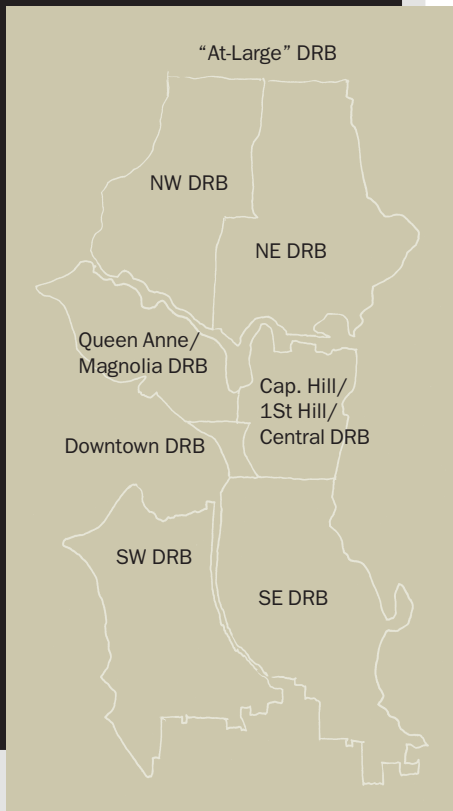
New Holly

Southeast Seattle
Design Review Board



Design Review Boards

Board Boundry Map



“We need to rethink the boundaries of the Boards. South Lake Union is an example of an area that does not work.”

8. Set up a DR project database in 2003 with staff resources and procedures to maintain it.

We need to create tools and use quantitative data to determine with accuracy how the Program is working and to evaluate its strengths and weaknesses. This is a critical factor in accomplishing recommendation #9, below.

9. Conduct an evaluation of the Design Review Program in 2004 focusing on whether the process has improved the quality of design.

Pending availability of funding, this evaluation should be conducted by CityDesign and the Design Commission, but may also use reviewers/critics from outside the region with experience in similar Design Review programs.

10. Commit to providing support to conduct timely and meaningful inspections of DR projects and handle compliance issues.

This could be accomplished by assigning follow-up to planners or by hiring a dedicated Design Review inspector. Regardless, the function is absolutely necessary to ensuring compliance with Design Review conditions.

Document results through the CityDesign Urban Design Resource Center and other venues.

2005-6: Maintain and Improve the Program

Maintaining and improving the Program means having the opportunity to take it to a higher level in terms of impact, visibility, innovation, and quality.

While work done in 2002, 2003, and 2004 will surely point the way to specific improvements that could be made, the following recommendations are a starting point for consideration:

1. Analyze the cost and benefit of departures and amend LUC as needed to incorporate commonly requested and granted departures.

This must be analyzed carefully prior to proposing any Land Use Code changes. Examples include: allow increased building width when there is no increase in lot coverage and reduce open space requirement.

2. Change project thresholds to review smaller projects administratively and/or raise thresholds for projects that require Board review. Also consider the impacts and/or resources needed to require review of minor institutions through the Program.

A necessary precursor to changing thresholds is further analysis of typical “small project” issues, including whether they can be addressed through staff review or whether they should be dropped from review altogether. This includes potential inclusion of minor institutions in the Program, since they often propose development that significantly impacts the character of surrounding neighborhoods.

3. Host a Design Review conference with CityDesign/SDC, inviting Board members, staff, and citizens from other programs/cities around the country.

“Mixed use buildings can really be problematic with respect to creating empty storefronts where retail isn’t viable. Why are we still building them? Or how can we build them better?”

Willis Condominiums

Queen Anne/Magnolia
Design Review Board



Checklist of 2005-6 Recommendations...

- ✓ Analyze the cost/benefit of departures.
- ✓ Change project thresholds.
- ✓ Host a Design Review conference.
- ✓ Develop an awards program.
- ✓ Continue public outreach.
- ✓ Develop neighborhood-based information for Boards.

4. Develop an awards program to reward good projects with formal acknowledgment and recognition, and related media coverage.

Create an awards program for successful built projects. One option is to have each Board select a project(s) they were pleased with, and then ask the Design Commission and/or reviewers from outside Seattle to select the winner(s).

5. Continue public outreach efforts with a variety of innovative tools and activities.

This could include an annual walking tour of successful projects for Board members and public alike. This could also lead to interesting discussions about the nature and character of each neighborhood within the city—their similarities and differences.

6. Develop neighborhood-based background information for Boards.

Although applicants are asked to provide contextual information as part of their application packet and presentation to the Board, not all comply or provide adequate information. In addition, there is contextual information beyond the immediate project that would be useful, such as neighborhood character maps, photos, profiles of previous Board-reviewed projects in the area.

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